6:Edwards E-5 (1955-1956)1962
FP13 Mbundu FP13

CHAPTER III

CHIEFS AND HEADMEN IN GUMBA

1. *The History of Gumba*

The historical perspective of Ovimbundu is short. Few, even elders, know of any landmark earlier than the Mutu-ya-Kevela rising of 1902–3, nor even for those who had participated in it did the time of the rubber trade form a Golden Age by which the present is judged. The period about which most was remembered was the reign of Mbati.[1]

Mbati had ruled over both Gumba and Chicunda, a union which had existed only during his lifetime, and which would have given him on present-day population figures 7,500–9,000 subjects.[2] He had managed to keep in his own hands the relations between his people and the government post. Policemen arriving at his capital to recruit labourers were entertained while Mbati's ministers got together the men required. Although an upholder of the traditional rites associated with chieftancy he had been on good terms with the missionaries and allowed a Catholic catechist to settle in his village. One of his sons became a Protestant schoolteacher near the railway line, another entered the Catholic seminary but left and became a policeman in Cela. Many of the numerous progeny provided by his seventeen wives are still living in Gumba.

Mbati's downfall came through his practising the traditional annual ritual cannibalism (*oku lia ekongo*). About 1934–5 he was banished for this to another part of Umbundu country.

[text continues on p. 37]

[1] L. Magyar marks a place called Gumba on his map (opposite to page 1) but puts it to the south of the capital of Bailundo. As he does not seem to have personal knowledge of this area, this does not rule out identification, especially as the Cuvo begins to the south of Bailundo.

[2] For the basis of this estimate see section 2 of this chapter.